

NATURAL RESOURCES AND RECREATION

Agency 471

State Conservation Commission

Recommendation Summary

Dollars in Thousands

	Annual FTEs	General Fund State	Other Funds	Total Funds
2005-07 Expenditure Authority	12.3	4,491	4,431	8,922
Total Maintenance Level	12.3	4,394	2,612	7,006
Difference		(97)	(1,819)	(1,916)
Percent Change from Current Biennium	0.0%	(2.2)%	(41.1)%	(21.5)%
Performance Changes				
Livestock Nutrient Assistance	.5		1,600	1,600
Livestock Nutrient Cost Share Grant	.5		2,500	2,500
Watershed Data Pilot Project		500		500
Implementing Conservation Practices			2,156	2,156
Sustaining Conservation Operations		200		200
Meeting Increased Demand for Farm Plans	2.0		5,700	5,700
Puget Sound Partnership Plan Implementation			2,000	2,000
Office of Working Farms and Forests	2.0	500		500
Revise Pension Gain-Sharing #		(4)	(2)	(6)
Nonrepresented Staff Health Benefit		6	4	10
Nonrepresented Staff Salary Change		67	38	105
Self Insurance Premium		1		1
Subtotal	5.0	1,270	13,996	15,266
Total Proposed Budget	17.3	5,664	16,608	22,272
Difference	5.0	1,173	12,177	13,350
Percent Change from Current Biennium	40.7%	26.1%	274.8%	149.6%
Total Proposed Budget by Activity				
Conservation District Audits	.1	2	230	232
Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)	.4	1,900		1,900
Technical Assistance Grants				
Direct Technical Assistance	6.5	1,764	250	2,014
District Basic Funding Grants	.4	1,294		1,294
Grant Administration	6.3	574	625	1,199
Professional Engineering Grants	.2		3,656	3,656
Landowner Education and Assessment	3.4		11,800	11,800
Other Statewide Adjustments		130	47	177
Total Proposed Budget	17.3	5,664	16,608	22,272

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PERFORMANCE LEVEL CHANGE DESCRIPTIONS

Livestock Nutrient Assistance

Livestock operations can pose a serious risk to water quality. The Conservation Commission estimates that there are more than 23,000 commercial and 200,000 small, non-commercial livestock operations statewide. Livestock operators face a changing and increasingly uncertain regulatory environment. Conservation districts will provide technical advice to owners and operators of livestock operations, and assist them in developing an estimated 400 nutrient management plans. These customized plans will spell out how landowners can manage their operations in a way that results in water quality and habitat improvements, as well as regulatory compliance. (Water Quality Account-State)

Livestock Nutrient Cost Share Grant

Ongoing funding is provided for financial assistance grants to landowners implementing best-management practices designed to protect water quality by controlling livestock nutrients. (Water Quality Account-State)

Watershed Data Pilot Project

The Conservation Commission conducted a legislatively mandated Watershed Data Pilot Project mandated by the Legislature during the 2005-07 Biennium. This program assessed the feasibility and desirability of a web-based data repository of salmon habitat, watershed data, that includes mapping and analysis tools for reporting at the local and state levels. It concluded that the system tested was effective in delivering consolidated watershed and project information and recommended that it be deployed statewide. Funding is provided for phased deployment of the system to all conservation districts. During the 2007-09 Biennium, the system will be provided to 25 conservation districts. It will be deployed to the remaining districts in the 2009-11 Biennium.

Implementing Conservation Practices

Farm conservation plans specify best-management practices designed to improve water quality and habitat or prevent soil erosion. When landowners secure federal funding for implementation of these practices, they need technical assistance, and, in some cases, professional engineering services, in order to ensure that the practices as installed meet federal standards. Although promotion of conservation programs under the federal Farm Bill has increased participation, federal staffing levels for engineering and technical assistance are declining, leading to implementation delays. To address this need, \$300,000 is provided on a one-time basis to enhance the engineering capacity of conservation districts, thereby reducing an estimated backlog of 1,800 federally-funded conservation practices in need of engineering review. In addition, \$1.9 million in state match and increased federal expenditure authority are provided on an ongoing basis to reduce a long-term backlog of 5,900 conservation practices in need of technical assistance from conservation districts. (General Fund-Federal, Water Quality Account-State)

Sustaining Conservation Operations

Most of the state's 47 conservation districts receive the majority of their funding from external grants tied to specific conservation projects. The Commission's budget provides basic funding grants of approximately \$10,000 per fiscal year to each district, regardless of need. Even with these basic funding grants, a number of very low-income districts struggle to cover basic expenses such as staff salaries, rent, and electricity. Ongoing funding is provided for supplementary basic funding allocations to the state's lowest-income conservation districts to be used for such non-project items and encourage financial self-sufficiency.

Meeting Increased Demand for Farm Plans

Farmers rely on conservation districts for technical assistance and farm plans to address potential effects of farm activities on the environment. In addition, some local governments view farm plans as a tool to provide regulatory certainty for farmers in the face of evolving land use rules, a trend that may require increased capacity for farm plans. Ongoing funding is provided for grants to conservation districts to provide outreach and education services, private landowner outreach and education; develop farm plans, technical and financial assistance to implement farm plans; and manage watershed restoration projects. These activities will help improve water quality, water quantity, and streambank stabilization. (Water Quality Account-State)

Puget Sound Partnership Plan Implementation

Ongoing funding is provided for the 12 Puget Sound conservation districts to provide technical assistance and project matching funds to farmers and horse owners to implement projects and management plans that are designed to restore habitat and improve water quality. (Water Quality Account-State)

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Office of Working Farms and Forests

Ongoing funding is provided for creation of a new Office of Working Farms and Forests. This Office will develop, promote, and assist agencies, local governments, and others in implementing programs that allow farms and forest landowners to recover some real estate value of their lands while continuing to manage these lands as working farms and forests. Examples of activities for maintaining working farms and forests include purchase and transfer of development rights, as well as conservation easements.

Self Insurance Premium

Funding for the Commission's self insurance premium is increased to reflect claims experience.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTIONS

Conservation District Audits

This activity supplies funding to cover the costs of the State Auditor's Office (SAO) to audit the state's 48 conservation districts. Conservation districts are legal subdivisions of state government, and these audits ensure that grants to the districts are spent in compliance with state laws.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Technical Assistance Grants

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a federal-state partnership created in 1998. It is a voluntary, streamside restoration program to enhance salmon habitat on agricultural lands by removing land from production and planting native trees and shrubs so that bank stabilization and other important ecological functions occur. Grants issued to 33 conservation districts statewide provide technical expertise in developing and implementing planting plans; help prepare required paperwork; and provide follow-up to ensure the survival of plantings. The program also has a capital component that is the state's match for installation and maintenance costs (the state pays 10 percent of installation costs and 100 percent of maintenance costs for five years).

Direct Technical Assistance

This activity includes providing regular training to staff in 48 conservation districts and to 500 conservation district Board of Supervisor volunteers. This aid strengthens public accountability and ensures that laws, rules, and procedures are being followed in the provision of services to citizens. Commission staff assist districts with a wide variety of issues, including organizational development, facilitation, personnel recruitment and management, financial planning, and local involvement. The Commission also ensures that the Board of Supervisor election and appointment processes are in accordance with commission procedures and RCW 89.08. The Commission coordinates stakeholder involvement on statewide issues relating to private landowner resources and helps identify statewide priorities in the natural resources arena.

District Basic Funding Grants

In 1989 the Legislature provided a basic level of funding for each conservation district. Grants are provided annually to each of the state's conservation districts for those basic administrative functions necessary to achieve water quality and natural resource preservation goals.

Grant Administration

The Conservation Commission has 332 active grant contracts. The grant administration activity consists of writing contracts, negotiating the scope of work, monitoring the activity, evaluating and reimbursing allowable expenses, and ensuring adherence to state laws. Additional administration activities include reviewing each district's administration of grants, and participating in stakeholder task forces/committees to provide for project evaluation and funding recommendations. All activities, including some capital projects not listed, are managed under this activity and the Direct Technical Assistance Activity.

Professional Engineering Grants

Through grants awarded to conservation districts, private engineers are hired to provide services to a group of conservation districts. These grants have allowed nine professional engineers to serve all 48 conservation districts at a much lower cost than by contracting for services or providing an engineer for each district. Through this coordinated effort, engineering services are available to private landowners to implement their natural resources conservation plans and ensure that projects meet required engineering standards.

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Landowner Education and Assessment

An assessment tool will be developed to assist landowners with livestock to determine the application of the Livestock Nutrient Management Act (RCW 90.64) at their facilities. This assessment tool will define the elements of an "animal feeding operation," a "confined animal feeding operation," and any necessary changes that might need to occur with their facilities. The tool enables the conservation districts and landowners to evaluate the water quality risks and compliance measures necessary to protect the natural resources.

Other Statewide Adjustments

This item reflects proposed compensation and other adjustments that were not allocated to individual agency activities. The agency will assign these costs to the proper activities after the budget is enacted.